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United Nations

Committee on Information

Report on the twenty-first session (3–14 May 1999)

General Assembly
Official Records
Fifty-fourth session
Supplement No. 21 (A/54/21)

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Note

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Chapter I
Introduction

1. At its thirty-fourth session, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established under Assembly resolution 33/115 C of 18 December 1978, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In paragraph 2 of section I of its resolution 34/182 of 18 December 1979, the Assembly requested the Committee on Information:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better-balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly."

and requested the Committee on Information and the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

2. At its thirty-fifth session the General Assembly, in its resolution 35/201 of 16 December 1980, expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the report of the Committee and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group,[1] reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in Assembly resolution 34/182 and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67 members. The Committee on Information agreed, at its organizational session in 1980, that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. At its thirty-sixth to fifty-first sessions, the General Assembly again expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee on Information, approved the reports of the Committee[2] and its recommendations and reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in its resolution 34/182 (General Assembly resolutions 36/149 B, 37/94 B, 38/82 B, 39/98 A, 40/164 A, 41/68 A, 42/162 A and B, 43/60 A and B, 44/50, 45/76 A and B, 46/73 B, 47/73 B, 48/44 B, 49/38 B, 50/31 B and 51/138 B). At its fifty-second session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[3] and adopted consensus resolutions 52/70 A and B of 10 December 1997. At its fifty-third session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee[4] and adopted consensus resolutions 53/59 A and B of 3 December 1998, in which it reiterated its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations to the Assembly relating to the work of the Department of Public Information.

4. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly appointed two new members of the Committee, namely China and Mexico; at its forty-first session, the Assembly appointed Malta as a new member of the Committee; at its forty-third session, the Assembly appointed Hungary, Ireland and Zimbabwe members of the Committee, and at its forty-fourth session, the Assembly appointed Nepal as a new member.

5. At its forty-fifth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Committee on Information, to increase the membership of the Committee from 74 to 78 members, and appointed Czechoslovakia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jamaica and Uruguay as members. The Assembly also decided to appoint the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic as a member of the Committee, with immediate effect, to fill the vacancy left by the German Democratic Republic.

6. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 78 to 79 members, and appointed Burkina Faso as a member of the Committee.

7. At its forty-seventh session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political Committee, to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 79 to 81, and appointed the Republic of Korea and Senegal as members of the Committee.

8. At its forty-eighth session, the Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 81 to 83, and appointed Gabon and Israel members of the Committee.

9. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), decided to

increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 83 to 88, and decided to appoint Belize, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan and South Africa as members of the Committee.

10. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly decided, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), to increase the membership from 88 to 89, and appointed the Democratic People's Republic of Korea a member of the Committee.

11. At its fifty-second session, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), decided to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 89 to 90 members, and to appoint Georgia a member of the Committee.

12. At its fifty-third session, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), decided to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 90 to 93 members, and to appoint Angola, the Republic of Moldova and Solomon Islands as members of the Committee.

13. The Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria
Angola
Argentina
Bangladesh
Belarus
Belgium
Belize
Benin
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Gabon
Georgia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Malta
Mexico
Mongolia
Morocco
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Republic of Korea
Republic of Moldova
Romania
Russian Federation
Senegal
Singapore
Slovakia
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Syrian Arab Republic
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela
Viet Nam
Yemen
Yugoslavia
Zimbabwe

Chapter II
Organizational questions

A. Opening of the session

14. The organizational meeting of the twenty-first session of the Committee on Information was held on 3 May 1999 at United Nations Headquarters. The session was opened by the outgoing Chairman of the Committee, José Alberto de Sousa (Portugal).

B. Election of officers

15. The Committee held elections for a new Bureau for a two-year term. Upon the nominations by the representatives of Mexico, Slovakia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Holger Martinsen (Argentina), Ivan Nimac (Croatia) and Peter Mollema (Netherlands) were elected as Vice-Chairmen by acclamation. Upon the nomination by the representative of Pakistan, Sidharto Reza Suryo-di-Puro (Indonesia) was elected as Rapporteur, by acclamation. At a subsequent meeting, held on 5 May, upon the nomination by the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania, El Hassane Zahid (Morocco) was elected as Chairman by acclamation. The officers of the Committee on Information for the period 1999–2000 are thus as follows:

Chairman:

El Hassane Zahid (Morocco)

Vice-Chairmen:

Holger Martinsen (Argentina)
Ivan Nimac (Croatia)
Peter Mollema (Netherlands)

Rapporteur:

Sidharto Reza Suryo-di-Puro (Indonesia)

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

16. At its organizational meeting, the Committee adopted its agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/1999/1/Rev.1):

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.

4. Statement by the Chairman.

5. Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.

6. General debate and consideration of substantive questions.

7. Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

17. The Committee held the substantive meetings of its twenty-first session at United Nations Headquarters from 3 to 14 May 1999.

18. For consideration of item 6, the Committee had before it the reports of the Secretary-General on:

(a) Reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/1999/2);

(b) Integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (A/AC.198/1999/3);

(c) United Nations information centres in 1998: allocation of resources from the regular budget of the United Nations (A/AC.198/1999/4);

(d) Development of United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity: design and scope of a pilot project (A/AC.198/1999/5);

(e) Continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites (A/AC.198/1999/6);

(f) Activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (A/AC.198/1999/7);

(g) Proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002–2005 (programme 23, Public information) (A/AC.198/1999/8).

19. In the course of the negotiations of the Committee's recommendations to the General Assembly, the Secretariat circulated, for information of delegations, a conference room paper containing the programme budget implications of a proposal considered for inclusion in draft resolution B (A/AC.198/1999/CRP.1).

D. Observers

20. The following Member States took part in the session as observers: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Gambia, Haiti, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Liberia, Luxembourg, Malawi, Monaco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Oman, Panama, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Holy See also participated as an observer.

21. Representatives of the following specialized agencies also participated as observers: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). The United Nations Correspondents Association also took part in the session as an observer.

E. Other matters

22. The Chairman informed the Committee that Mozambique had requested to become a member of the Committee on Information.

Chapter III
General debate and consideration of substantive questions

23. Statements during the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee: Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, Ghana, Guyana (on behalf of the States members of the Group of 77 and China), India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica (on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community), Japan, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Nepal, Netherlands (on behalf of the States members of the Western European and Other States Group), Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania and Yemen.

24. The Director of the Communications Division of UNESCO addressed the Committee, as did the President of the United Nations Correspondents Association.

25. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, speakers underscored the significance of the World Press Freedom Day observance, which had been held prior to the opening of the session. One delegation called it a unique and valuable opportunity to reaffirm the vital importance of securing freedom of the press. Many speakers paid tribute to journalists worldwide who had lost their lives or suffered injuries in the line of duty and condemned the use of violence to silence them or obstruct their work. One

delegation was of the view that a special international legal instrument should be elaborated to help protect journalists working in areas of armed conflict. One delegation stated that discussions at the Press Freedom Day testified to the need to establish a balance in the dissemination of information to ensure diversification of its sources and to attain a mutually beneficial partnership between the developed and developing countries. One speaker on behalf of a large group said that the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, free and pluralistic press was essential to the development and maintenance of democracy. The UNESCO representative said that the Committee played a vital role in the defence of freedom of the press. He said that UNESCO had condemned violence against journalists and called upon Member States to stop all actions that deprived journalists of their rights.

26. Many speakers said they attached the highest priority to achieving a new, more just and effective global information and communications order, based on a free and balanced flow of information. They observed that state-of-the-art communications technologies transcended barriers of time and space, transforming all areas of human activity and rendering the world a global community. One speaker said the world had gone from the "Industrial Age" to the "Information Age". Many delegations stated the belief that modern information technology and a transparent information network were key to progress and development, and were keenly aware that the gulf between developed and developing countries in the global information network remained wide. A number of delegations stated that the gap had become even wider. In the words of one delegation, for people still struggling in a hand-to-mouth existence, the Internet and digital television were "as far away and unimaginable as aliens are". Many speakers pointed to the need to rectify, on a priority basis, the imbalances in both the availability of information and in the capacity of different nations and organizations to process it. One delegation emphasized the "nexus between the establishment of the new international economic order and the new world information order" and pointed to the fact that information had become the lifeblood of domestic and global markets. Another speaker, referring to General Assembly resolution 53/70 of 4 December 1998, saw security of information as a vital priority, and called for the United Nations to create international principles to this end and to establish conditions for safe international information exchange.

27. In addressing the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, a number of speakers suggested that the Department of Public Information had an important role to play in bridging the information gap between developed and developing countries. One speaker said that the question "to be squarely addressed" was the extent to which the reorientation exercise would meet the aspirations of the developing world and correct the present imbalance in the field of information and communications. He said that the focus of any strategy must be on developmental issues, and urged the Department to do more. Several speakers were of the view that the desired outcome of the measures adopted to reorient the Department's activities was to project the Organization as an open, transparent and public institution, fully capable of meeting the principal objectives of the Charter of the United Nations. One speaker, on behalf of a large group, said that the information technology gap was likely to affect inter-State cooperation in a number of areas, including commercial and economic relations, and therefore the United Nations must ensure that the developing countries were equitably served in the field of communications and information. In the words of one speaker, "for the culture of information to permeate, we need to carry along the entire membership of the United Nations".

28. Most speakers agreed that the development of a culture of communications within the Organization was the prime responsibility of the Department of Public Information, in order to promote a better understanding of the United Nations and its impact on the lives of people everywhere. The view was expressed that the coming century would demand better and more efficient forms of public information. Dissemination of information on United Nations activities was seen by all speakers as essential to achieving a more peaceful and just world. To this end, one speaker said, strategic communications were crucial as a means of generating broader support for the Organization, and several others reiterated that the information and communications function should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization. One speaker pointed to the importance of the Millennium Summit and Assembly in 2000 and said that the Department of Public Information should play a central role in formulating and implementing an effective public information strategy to ensure that the Summit enjoyed broad popular support. Another speaker pointed to the importance of "Dialogue among Civilizations" envisaged in General Assembly resolution 53/22 of 4 November 1998 and requested the Department of Public Information to facilitate, through organizing seminars and the dissemination of information, the promotion of international attention and understanding on this issue.

29. Speakers congratulated the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information on his

commendable efforts, within the limited resources available, to improve coverage of United Nations activities and to respond to the requirements of Member States. One speaker on behalf of a large group and a number of others noted the establishment of the Communications Group and the Strategic Communications Planning Group, which were aimed at better integrating information into the work of the entire United Nations system and at enhancing public awareness of the Organization. Several speakers asked for additional information on the composition, role and achievements of these bodies, as well as on their relationship to each other, in order to better assess their impact. In their view, such measures could, if effectively utilized, provide a greater focus, coordination and coherence to the Department's activities. Another delegation welcomed the increasing role of civil society in the redissemination of the message of the United Nations, as well as the role played by the Media Response Group in preparing timely responses to misinformation or criticism of the United Nations in the media. One speaker, on behalf of a group, said that, with regard to strategic changes, the recent steps taken to improve the news gathering and delivery systems were welcomed and her group would continue to monitor the effects of the enhanced news focus of the Department, in the light of the creation of a new News and Media Services Division.

30. Most speakers agreed that in the race to disseminate information in a world with many competing priorities, it was essential that the Department of Public Information be competent and competitive in disseminating information and sharing data and collaborative research. A number of speakers pointed to the crucial importance of developing, maintaining and enriching United Nations Web sites and congratulated the Department of Public Information for successfully operating a United Nations news section and Web page. One delegation thanked the Department for the "very comprehensive, easy-to-access and rich in content Web site it had put together". Another speaker suggested that the Department undertake a study on the fundamental impact of Internet technology on its public information activities. One speaker, on behalf of a large group, stressed that since the United Nations Web pages are essentially publications, they must be treated like other publications with due respect for balanced, comprehensive and objective information. One delegation said that it was important to ensure that documents containing information "from secessionist entities" not find their way to the official United Nations Web site.

31. In underscoring the fact, as reported by the Secretary-General, that most of the visits to the United Nations Web site come from developed countries, a number of speakers, including one on behalf of a large group, said that efforts must be made to redress this imbalance. Also, many speakers, while supporting the use of advanced technologies, including the Internet, stressed that this should not be done at the expense of traditional means of communication, such as radio, which continued to be the main source of information in most developing countries. Speakers said that they had welcomed assurances by the Secretary-General that the Department of Public Information would continue to maintain and expand the use of traditional means of disseminating information. They were of the view, therefore, that the discouraging conclusions in the report on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations, which was before the Committee, contradicted such assurances. There was wide agreement on this point, and a delegate speaking for a large group said that his group expected the Department to proceed with the pilot project in order to reach a worldwide audience and thus redress, to some degree, the imbalances and inequalities between developed and developing countries in the field of information and communications. Another speaker said that his country disagreed with the Secretary-General's conclusion and with the criteria applied in reaching it, and called upon the Secretariat to implement the wishes of the membership and to reassess the situation regarding the pilot project, "including the means to appropriate the necessary financial resources for its implementation".

32. On the other hand, several speakers agreed with the Secretary-General's conclusion that a direct international radio broadcasting project would not be feasible until Member States and/or broadcast organizations concerned could provide the United Nations with the necessary budgetary and technical assistance. One delegation stated that it had already informed the Secretariat of its preparedness to cooperate fully with the Department of Public Information regarding the use of its broadcasting facilities. One speaker said that if the Department of Public Information decided to develop such a project, it would be advisable to consider first preparing a small-scale and less costly pilot project. Several delegations called for immediate circulation of the questionnaire to assess the availability of resources. One speaker, on behalf of a large group, asked the Secretariat to continue to look for the necessary finances and "to continue to investigate the technical feasibility of an international broadcasting capacity for the United Nations, through contacts with Governments and broadcasters".

33. One speaker emphasized the important role of United Nations Radio and United Nations Television in disseminating information on the objectives of the Organization throughout the African continent. Another

speaker said that his delegation considered the development of a telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas to be one of the greatest challenges and opportunities for the African continent. In that connection, his delegation intended to raise the possibility of installing a camera linked to the Internet inside the General Assembly chamber to bring live debates to schools in rural areas. Two speakers on behalf of large groups referred to the year 2000 computer problem and expressed the hope that the United Nations had done all it could to prevent its operations being affected and asked to be informed of the status of United Nations compliance.

34. One speaker expressed his appreciation for the Department's innovative audio service, which transmitted the United Nations noon briefing and radio news using the latest communications technology. The same speaker expressed his delegation's support for the utilization of direct satellite broadcasting services and stressed that the active participation of concerned Member States was vital in achieving the goals of this project. Another delegation said that it was heartened to note that Chinese language programmes were being delivered to major broadcasting stations in China as well as in North America by electronic audio transfer, and also welcomed the productive cooperation between United Nations Radio and China Radio International as well as China National Radio. This delegation said that the Chinese language production staff at United Nations Radio were highly professional, and asked that the Department take steps to increase resource allocations to Chinese programming. Another speaker said that his country was particularly satisfied with the agreement signed by the Brazilian Public Radio Network and United Nations Radio to allow for information in Portuguese to reach a wide number of listeners in Brazil through a receiving network. Another speaker said that radio remained the main medium of communication in the Caribbean, and therefore the Department should comply with the unfulfilled mandate to disseminate programmes in French and Creole. At the same time, she commended the Caribbean Radio Unit for its "sterling contribution" to awareness of the United Nations in the region.

35. A number of delegations condemned what they called the aggression carried out by a regional treaty organization, bypassing the United Nations and the Security Council, against a sovereign State. In particular, they condemned the bombing of that State's national broadcasting organization, which had resulted in casualties among its employees and the destruction of television and radio transmitters. One delegation said that it was the goal of that regional treaty organization to eliminate the information network of that country, while at the same time radio stations in its member States were transmitting unsanctioned broadcasts there. This was seen as violating the fundamental principle of freedom of information.

36. Another speaker said that over 1,600 hours of radio aggression, which originated in another Member State, continued to be aired weekly in his country. This amounted to electronic warfare against its sovereignty and the norms of international law. Such broadcasts manipulated and distorted his country's reality and they should be denounced.

37. On multilingualism in information activities, a number of speakers emphatically supported the maintenance of linguistic diversity as a crucial part of the information policy of the United Nations. One speaker said that multilingualism was not only a question of principle, but also of effectiveness in presenting a pluralist image of the United Nations, and to this end, "the current expression of public information of the United Nations practically in a single language" was not acceptable. He used the Web site of a regional organization as an example of one that successfully incorporated 11 different languages. With regard to the use of all six official languages on the Web site, several speakers specifically supported proposal C contained in the report of the Secretary-General on continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites (A/AC.198/1999/6, paras. 33–42), which seeks to balance linguistic diversity and availability of resources for that purpose. One delegation said that while language parity was desirable in the provision of on-line information, cost implications could not be overlooked. Another delegation requested that the United Nations Web site offer more "dynamic contents in Spanish", a point with which another delegation agreed. Several delegations pointed to the enrichment of the United Nations Web site by the addition of Chinese and Arabic Web pages last year. Another commented that the current Chinese language site was "still far from satisfactory" in both content and scale, which was particularly unfortunate since Internet technology was developing very quickly in China. Another speaker supported more Russian programming, including using satellite broadcasting. One delegation on behalf of a large group said that the Department should be encouraged to continue to apply its resources to ensure that the United Nations message was delivered in the right mix of languages and with the right technology. One speaker, who reiterated the strong conviction that public information could not be disseminated in a single language, was of the view that the objective of multilingualism was not simply a translation exercise, but was instead a matter of changing "the information architecture of the Organization itself".

38. One speaker, on behalf of a large group, and several other delegations said that the Department's publications should be objective and impartial, as should the information made available on the United Nations Web site. Several speakers noted that a large percentage of the population in the developing countries was not aware of the United Nations and suggested that it was in part the result of focusing too much attention of the Organization on certain developed countries "to galvanize public opinion with a view to getting increased funding for the Organization in the process".

39. With regard to specific information activities, one delegation said that the cooperative arrangements that the Department had established with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations were very important in the effort to disseminate information to and assist people in crisis and conflict situations. The rapid deployment and proper management of information components in peacekeeping operations, including a radio broadcasting capacity, could save lives. A number of speakers welcomed the work undertaken by the Department to highlight the activities and accomplishments of the Organization in the area of development and encouraged it to do more in this regard. Another, speaking on behalf of a large group, said that the general public should be equally aware of the Organization's development initiatives as they were of its peacekeeping operations. One speaker noted that there was a growing concern among a number of countries that the United Nations placed too much emphasis on publicizing activities in the field of maintaining international peace and security. Another agreed that the focus of any public information and communications strategy had to be on development issues, which were the basic challenge before the developing countries. Speakers cited economic and social development issues, such as poverty eradication, health education, human rights, gender equality and population, as key areas on which to concentrate. One delegation speaking on behalf of a group drew attention to the priority concerns of small island developing States.

40. Another speaker noted with pleasure that steps were being taken by the Department of Public Information for appropriate coverage of the various five-year reviews of the decade's major United Nations conferences. Another speaker said that information should be targeted to help the countries with economies in transition. Speakers encouraged cooperation between the Department, Governments and civil society to intensify advocacy of development issues. One delegate added that the Department should also assist the developing countries in improving their capacity in the field of public information and communications. In this connection, several speakers expressed their support for the Department's training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and urged the Department to expand such programmes. Several delegations expressed appreciation for the Department's efforts to publicize the humanitarian and environmental problems associated with the Chernobyl disaster. The Department's activities were important in the face of donor fatigue and the lack of funding for rehabilitation projects. One speaker pointed to the need for a long-term information programme on the disaster and another requested a special Web site. Another proposed that the Department consider publicizing the problem of the former nuclear test site near Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan, in the context of General Assembly resolution 53/1 H of 16 November 1998.

41. Many speakers emphasized that they attached great importance to the work of the United Nations information centres, emphasizing their importance in maintaining direct contact between the United Nations and local communities, as well as in serving as an important source of feedback in each country. Delegations were of the view that in the developing countries, particular emphasis should be given to integrating technological innovations into their activities so that centres could be models of "high-tech information for the resource-starved people", as one speaker described it. Another said that his delegation supported an increase in the level of resources made available to the United Nations information centres and services around the world, particularly in Africa. One delegation called for the Secretary-General to propose the financing of information centre posts, "preferably from the regular budget".

42. In regard to the process of integrating United Nations information centres with field offices of UNDP, one speaker on behalf of a large group expressed approval for such steps to reform information dissemination by United Nations bodies. In his view, the effectiveness of the United Nations message would be increased through a single "United Nations house" and the intertwining of all aspects of the United Nations information package. It was, however, a prerequisite of success to maintain a continuous dialogue with the Governments and relevant segments of society in the host countries. Another speaker said that every effort must be made to ensure the successful integration of the two United Nations entities in order to strengthen overall information activity through collaborative partnership, in particular at this time of scarce resources.

43. However, a number of speakers, including one on behalf of a large group, expressed concern over the integration exercise. They agreed that a thorough review of the policy of integration was called for, in view of the

findings of the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities, which indicated that the integration process had not been uniformly productive. They said that deficiencies had also been mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General on the subject (A/AC.198/1999/3), which was now before the Committee. Many delegations said that in the process of integration, cost-effective approaches should not hinder the information functions and autonomy of the centres. They suggested that financial and budgetary considerations should not take precedence over operational and strategic objectives. In this connection, several delegations recalled the Deputy Secretary-General's words that "reform is much more than just the question of streamlining structures or looking at the number of posts or dealing with the budget". One speaker said that integration was a narrowly focused policy that ignored the Organization's responsibilities to the people of the developing world. He said that the services and programme delivery of the integrated centres had drastically fallen, raising serious questions about the validity of the policy. Many speakers called for a case-by-case review of the performance of all integrated centres on a priority basis and in full consultation with the host Governments. A report on the review should be submitted to the General Assembly during its fifty-fourth session through the Committee on Information. Many speakers stressed also that any decision on integration of individual centres should be arrived at in consultation with the host Government and on a case-by-case basis. One delegation hoped that the Department of Public Information and UNDP would further study the problems of integration to ensure that United Nations information centres could perform their intended duties effectively. Several speakers referred to the guidelines to be elaborated between the Secretariat and UNDP, which would detail the operational framework for the integrated centres, and looked forward to reviewing them in the Committee before implementation. Another speaker was not certain that problems could be bridged merely by strengthening cooperation, and was of the view that more concrete measures directed at management roles were required. One delegation on behalf of a group suggested that there should be an institutionalized training programme for resident representatives/coordinators, which would incorporate an information component and become part of the Staff College programme.

44. One speaker said that the United Nations Information Centre in Dar es Salaam was one of those centres currently operating under the direction of the UNDP resident representative without formal integration and was struggling to serve even the Tanzanian population, much less the people of Lesotho and Mozambique, which it also serviced. Another said that the Centre in New Delhi should continue to be headed by a full-time Director at the D-1 level, and suggested that it highlight, in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping, the role of United Nations peacekeeping operations and India's long-standing commitment to participation in them. One speaker emphasized the importance that his delegation attached to the Centre in Islamabad and stressed the need for further strengthening of its effectiveness. One delegation said that in its capital of Zagreb, there was a small United Nations Liaison Office, as well as a UNDP office, and, in his view, the inclusion of an information component in the former office would serve the interests of the Organization and the region. Another noted recent intensification of the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow, while one speaker supported the information component in Minsk and asked for its strengthening. One delegation expressed appreciation for the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Colombo, and another said that the information component operating under the direction of the UNDP resident representative in the Ukraine was effective. Another speaker welcomed the appointment of a new Director in the United Nations Information Centre in Rio de Janeiro, and one said that the United Nations Information Centre in Tehran, which should be further strengthened, deserved admiration for its "useful service and cooperation with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and with non-governmental institutions". According to one delegation, the United Nations Information Centre in Cairo, which had no longer been a centre in the traditional sense of the word since its integration, was therefore performing weakly. One speaker on behalf of a group commended the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Port-of-Spain, which served 14 Member States, as well as eight Non-Self-Governing Territories, and had suffered a decline in human and financial resources. She said that her group had called for several years for a national information officer to be reinstated in the UNDP multi-country office in Kingston, which served the northern Caribbean. Another delegation commended the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Buenos Aires and its staff, underlined the financial support of its Government and suggested an increase in the level assigned to its Director.

45. One delegation, in prescribing an "ethos of partnership" for the global community, suggested that delegations to the United Nations could form an open-ended group at the level of permanent representatives to work with the Department of Public Information to promote its objectives and to engage like-minded collaborators. While several delegations commented favourably on the

Department's partnerships with the international media, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions, one speaker said that priorities of status were sometimes given to these groups to the detriment of Member States. In regard to working with the specialized agencies, programmes and funds of the United Nations system, one delegation pointed to the report of the Joint United Nations Information Committee, which highlighted proactive steps taken to foster a communications culture within the Organization.

46. A number of delegations expressed their appreciation for the services of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. One delegation, speaking on behalf of a group, commended the positive steps made by the Department in modernizing the facilities of the Library through the creation of a "virtual library". She said that all delegations could no doubt attest to the user-friendly environment enjoyed by the missions, and suggested that the latter be able to participate, where possible, in courses organized for Secretariat staff. One speaker was appreciative of the Library's dissemination of information through electronic mail. Another noted that there appeared to be a reduced investment in books in the name of focusing on modern technology, and also that the Library should acquire an increased number of relevant publications and periodicals from the developing countries.

47. A number of delegations expressed disappointment that the reports of the Secretary-General due for consideration at the session were not available within the time-frame provided in General Assembly resolutions and expressed hope that in the future the reports would be available well in advance of the Committee's sessions.

48. At the end of the general debate, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information made a statement responding to some of the questions raised by delegations.

Chapter IV
Preparation and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session

49. In accordance with operative paragraph 43 of resolution 53/59 B of 3 December 1998, the preparation of the Committee's report was carried out by an open-ended working group. After the open-ended working group completed its work, at its seventh meeting, on 14 May 1999, the Committee decided, by consensus, to recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolutions and draft decision:

Draft resolution A

Information in the service of humanity

The General Assembly,

Taking note of the comprehensive and important report of the Committee on Information,[5]

Also taking note of the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information,[6]

Urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned, reaffirming their commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the principles of freedom of the press and freedom of information, as well as to those of the independence, pluralism and diversity of the media, deeply concerned by the disparities existing between developed and developing countries and the consequences of every kind arising from those disparities that affect the capability of the public, private or other media and individuals in developing countries to disseminate information and communicate their views and their cultural and ethical values through endogenous cultural production, as well as to ensure the diversity of sources and their free access to information, and recognizing the call in this context for what in the United Nations and at various international forums has been termed "a new world information and communication order, seen as an evolving and continuous process":

(a) To cooperate and interact with a view to reducing existing disparities in information flows at all levels by increasing assistance for the development of communication infrastructures and capabilities in developing countries, with due regard for their needs and the priorities attached to such areas by those countries, and in order to enable them and the public, private or other media in developing countries to develop their own information and communication policies freely and independently and increase the participation of media and individuals in the communication process, and to ensure a free flow of information at all levels;

(b) To ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them;

(c) To provide support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes for broadcasters and journalists from public, private and other media in developing countries;

(d) To enhance regional efforts and cooperation among developing countries, as well as cooperation between

developed and developing countries, to strengthen communication capacities and to improve the media infrastructure and communication technology in the developing countries, especially in the areas of training and dissemination of information;

(e) To aim, in addition to bilateral cooperation, at providing all possible support and assistance to the developing countries and their media, public, private or other, with due regard to their interests and needs in the field of information and to action already adopted within the United Nations system, including:

(i) The development of the human and technical resources that are indispensable for the improvement of information and communication systems in developing countries and support for the continuation and strengthening of practical training programmes, such as those already operating under both public and private auspices throughout the developing world;

(ii) The creation of conditions that will enable developing countries and their media, public, private or other, to have, by using their national and regional resources, the communication technology suited to their national needs, as well as the necessary programme material, especially for radio and television broadcasting;

(iii) Assistance in establishing and promoting telecommunication links at the subregional, regional and interregional levels, especially among developing countries;

(iv) The facilitation, as appropriate, of access by the developing countries to advanced communication technology available on the open market;

(f) To provide full support for the International Programme for the Development of Communication[7] of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which should support both public and private media.

Draft resolution B

United Nations public information policies and activities

The General Assembly,

Reiterating its decision to consolidate the role of the Committee on Information as its main subsidiary body mandated to make recommendations to it relating to the work of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat,

Concurring with the view of the Secretary-General that public information and communications should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations, and that a culture of communications should permeate all levels of the Organization, as a means of fully informing the peoples of the world of the aims and activities of the United Nations,

1. *Reaffirms* its resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946, in which it established the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat;

2. *Welcomes* Angola, the Republic of Moldova and Solomon Islands to membership in the Committee on Information;

3. *Calls upon* the Secretary-General, in respect of the public information policies and activities of the United Nations, to continue to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 2 of its resolution 48/44 B of 10 December 1993 and other mandates as established by the General Assembly;

4. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications,[8] and encourages him to continue the reorientation exercise in the area of public information and communications, while stressing the need to take into account the views of Member States, and requests him to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session, in 2000;

5. *Emphasizes* that, through its reorientation, the Department of Public Information should maintain and improve its activities in the areas of special interest to developing countries and, where appropriate, other countries with special needs, including countries in transition, and that such reorientation should contribute to bridging the existing gap between the developing and the developed countries in the crucial field of public information and communications;

6. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the proposed medium-term plan for the period 2002–2005: programme 23, public information,[9] and, emphasizing that the implementation of the broad objectives, as outlined in the proposal, should be in accordance with the objectives set forth in relevant General Assembly resolutions regarding the questions relating to information, requests the Secretary-General to proceed with its submission for consideration by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, in accordance with section I of General Assembly resolution 53/207 of 18 December 1998;

7. *Requests* the Secretary-General to also give a particular focus to educational institutions as key and

indispensable partners of the United Nations in its efforts to fully inform the peoples of the world of its aims and activities;

8. *Takes note with appreciation* of the efforts of the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information for the formation and day-to-day functioning of the information components of peacekeeping and other field operations of the United Nations, and requests the Secretariat to continue to ensure the involvement of the Department of Public Information from the planning stage of such future operations through interdepartmental consultations and coordination with other substantive departments of the Secretariat;

9. *Encourages* the Secretary-General to further strengthen consultative arrangements between the Department of Public Information and other substantive departments in the Secretariat, in particular those dealing with development issues;

10. *Recalls* its resolution 53/22 of 4 November 1998 concerning the designation of the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, and encourages the Secretary-General to strengthen the public information capacity of the Department of Public Information with a view to disseminating information on and drawing international attention to the Dialogue among Civilizations and the impact it could have on promoting mutual understanding, tolerance, peaceful co-existence and international cooperation;

11. *Recalls* its resolution 53/202 of 17 December 1998 concerning the designation of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly as the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations and the convening, as an integral part of the Millennium Assembly, of the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, and encourages the Secretary-General to formulate and implement an effective public information strategy in this regard so as to ensure that the Summit will enjoy broad international support;

12. *Emphasizes* that all publications of the Department of Public Information should fulfil an identifiable need, should not duplicate other publications inside the United Nations system and should be produced in a cost-effective manner;

13. *Takes note with appreciation* of the efforts of the Secretary-General to move the Dag Hammarskjöld Library in the direction of a virtual library, and requests him, at the same time, to enrich the stock of books and journals in the Library, including on peace and security as well as development-related issues, in order to ensure that it continues to be a broadly accessible resource for information about the United Nations and its activities;

14. *Urges* the Secretary-General to exert all efforts to ensure that publications and other information services of the Secretariat, including the United Nations Web site, contain comprehensive, objective and equitable information about the issues before the Organization and maintain editorial independence, impartiality, accuracy and full consistency with resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly;

15. *Notes* that the request made to the Secretary-General, in its resolution 53/59 B of 3 December 1998, to ensure full and direct access for the representatives of Member States to the briefings organized at Headquarters by the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General, and to ensure wider outreach of the outcome of such briefings, has not been implemented, and therefore reiterates that request;

16. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that information presented to the media is made available to delegations fully and in a timely fashion;

17. *Reaffirms* the importance attached by Member States to the role of United Nations information centres in effectively and comprehensively disseminating information in all parts of the world, in particular in developing countries and countries in transition, and especially in those countries where there is need for greater understanding about United Nations activities;

18. *Also reaffirms* the importance of all United Nations information centres meeting the primary objectives outlined by the Committee on Information in its report on its ninth session;[10]

19. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme,[11] in which he notes that the objectives of the integration exercise remain valid, and notes his intention to make a concerted effort to address the problems encountered in the implementation of the integration exercise in a number of information centres;

20. *Notes with concern* that, while the co-location of United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme has, to some extent, been able to promote the image of the United Nations, the integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of the Programme has, in general, resulted in a lower level of programme delivery and a narrower range of activities and in cases of relocation of

information centres to common premises with the Programme, has frequently resulted in higher maintenance costs and has been suffering from leadership and staff problems and that, to a large extent, the policy of integration has not in all cases achieved its stated objective of performing functions efficiently, effectively and in a cost-effective manner;

21. *Requests* the Secretary-General to carry out a case-by-case review of, and submit his proposals on the functioning of, the integrated centres on a priority basis, in full consultation with the host Governments, and to submit a report during the twenty-second session of the Committee on Information;

22. *Further notes* that the Department of Public Information intends to draft, jointly with the United Nations Development Programme, a set of guidelines indicating the operational framework for the integrated centres, and requests the Secretary-General to report on the guidelines before its implementation to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session;

23. *Reaffirms* the role of the General Assembly in relation to the opening of new United Nations information centres, and invites the Secretary-General to make such recommendations as he may judge necessary regarding the establishment and location of such centres;

24. *Takes note* of the information provided by the Secretary-General in his report concerning the allocation of resources to United Nations information centres in 1998,[12] and calls upon him to continue to study ways and means of rationalizing and effecting equitable disbursement of available resources to all United Nations information centres and to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session;

25. *Welcomes* the action taken by some Member States with regard to providing financial and material support to United Nations information centres in their respective capitals, and invites the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to consult Member States, where appropriate, on the possibility of providing the centres with additional voluntary support on a national basis, bearing in mind that such support should not be a substitute for the full allocation of financial requirements for the United Nations information centres in the context of the programme budget of the United Nations;

26. *Welcomes* the requests of Croatia, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, Jamaica and Kyrgyzstan for information centres or information components;

27. *Recognizes* the continuing enhanced cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the University for Peace in Costa Rica as a focal point for promoting United Nations activities and disseminating United Nations information materials, and requests the Secretary-General to report on those activities;

28. *Expresses its full support* for wide, accurate, equal and prompt coverage of United Nations activities through the continuation and improvement of United Nations press releases, stresses the importance of having these press releases issued in all official languages of the United Nations, and requests other relevant bodies of the General Assembly to give due consideration to this matter;

29. *Stresses* that radio is one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching media available to the Department of Public Information and an important instrument in United Nations activities, such as development and peacekeeping, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 48/44 B;

30. *Encourages* further strengthening of the availability of programmes of United Nations Radio, in all available languages, on the United Nations Web site on the Internet;

31. *Requests* the Secretary-General to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 38/82 B of 15 December 1983 with regard to the introduction of full programming in French and Creole in the work programme of the Caribbean Unit of United Nations Radio;

32. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on the design and scope of a pilot project for the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations,[13] and requests the Department of Public Information to start, as soon as possible, the implementation of the pilot project through, *inter alia*, contacts with interested Member States and other specialized institutions, with a view to ensuring the assistance necessary for the success of the project, taking into account the need to enhance the existing resources and services, and further requests the Secretary-General to submit a progress report on the implementation of this project to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session;

33. *Underlines* the continuing importance of using traditional and mass media channels to disseminate information about the United Nations, and encourages the Secretary-General, through the Department of Public Information, to continue to take full advantage of recent developments in information technologies, including the Internet, to improve, in a cost-effective manner, the dissemination of information about the United Nations, in

accordance with the priorities established by the General Assembly and taking into account the linguistic diversity of the Organization;

34. *Takes note* of efforts by some United Nations information centres to establish their own Web pages in local languages, and recommends the Department of Public Information to encourage other information centres to develop Web pages in the respective local languages of host countries;

35. *Takes note with appreciation* of the efforts of the Secretary-General to develop the United Nations Web site in all the official languages of the Organization and, in that regard, takes note of his report on the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of the United Nations Web sites,[14] and requests him to further develop his proposals pertaining to option C discussed therein, in a cost-effective manner and with a focus on textual content, including appropriate programme budget implications, for consideration by the Committee on Information or other relevant bodies;

36. *Expresses its appreciation* for the ongoing programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and countries in transition conducted by the Department of Public Information, and calls for its further expansion to include a larger number of trainees from developing countries;

37. *Acknowledges* the important work carried out by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and its collaboration with news agencies and broadcasting organizations in developing countries in disseminating information on priority issues;

38. *Requests* the Department of Public Information to continue to ensure the greatest possible access for United Nations guided tours, as well as to ensure that displays in public areas are kept as informative, up-to-date, relevant and technologically innovative as possible;

39. *Recalls* its resolutions concerning the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, in particular resolutions 51/138 B of 13 December 1996 and 52/172 of 16 December 1997, and encourages the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with the countries concerned and with the relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to continue to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the consequences of that disaster;

40. *Recalls also* its resolution 53/1 H of 16 November 1998, concerning international cooperation for the human and ecological rehabilitation of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan affected by nuclear tests, and encourages the Department of Public Information, in cooperation with relevant organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, to take appropriate measures to enhance world public awareness of the problems and needs of the Semipalatinsk region;

41. *Recalls* its resolution 53/59 of 3 December 1998 and urges the Department of Public Information to take the necessary measures, through the provision of relevant and objective information, with a view to achieving the major objectives set forth in the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa;[15]

42. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session, in 2000, and to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session, in 2000, on the activities of the Department of Public Information and on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the present resolution;

43. *Requests* the Committee on Information to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session;

44. *Decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its fifty-fifth session the item entitled "Questions relating to information".

Draft decision

Increase in the membership of the Committee on Information

The General Assembly decides to increase the membership of the Committee on Information from 93 to 94 members and to appoint Mozambique as a member of the Committee on Information.

50. Following the adoption of the draft resolutions and the draft decision, statements were made by the representative of the Netherlands (on behalf of the States members of the Western European and Other States Group), Croatia (on behalf of the States members of the Eastern European Group), Guyana (on behalf of the States members of the Group of 77 and China), Egypt, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, India and Chile.

51. The representative of the Netherlands was pleased to take note of the consensus which had been achieved within the Committee and said that he was confident that it would prevail in the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee). He reiterated the support of his group for the process of integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of UNDP and noted that, while his group was aware that problems existed, it was

confident that these would be addressed by the Secretary-General. The representative of Croatia thanked delegations for the flexibility that they had exercised in the negotiations. The representative of Guyana expressed the hope that the draft resolutions would serve as a basis for long-term action aimed at satisfying the expectations of all States Members of the United Nations regarding its public information policies and activities. She also emphasized the importance that her group attached to the open-ended informal consultations and expressed the hope that this method would become an established practice in the Committee's work.

52. The representative of Egypt referred to the method of work of the Committee and was of the view that the open-ended working group should continue to be active between sessions and serve as a forum for the discussion of public information and communications strategies. The representative of the United Kingdom agreed that the proposed focus on substance, rather than means, could help to further advance the message of the United Nations. The representative of India was also in favour of strengthening and improving the working methods of the Committee. The representative of Chile agreed with this point and said that it was important for the message of the United Nations to be received in zones of conflict.

53. The Chairman agreed to consult with the members of the Committee to further pursue the suggestion put forward by the representative of Egypt. He noted also that the Committee would hold a resumed session in autumn, prior to the consideration of item 91 of the provisional agenda of the fifty-fourth session, entitled "Questions relating to information" by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee). The proposals by the Secretary-General pertaining to option "C" discussed in his report on the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites[14] would be considered at that time.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/35/21), annex, sect. V.

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/36/21); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/37/21 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/38/21 and Corr.1 and 2); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/39/21); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/40/21); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/41/21); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/42/21); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/43/21); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/44/21); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/45/21); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/46/21); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/47/21); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/48/21); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/49/21); ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/50/21); and ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/51/21).

[3] Ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/52/21/Rev.1).

[4] Ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 21* (A/53/21/Rev.1).

[5] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/54/21).

[6] A/53/509.

[7] See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Records of the General Conference, Twenty-first Session, Belgrade, 23 September to 28 October 1980*, vol. 1, *Resolutions*, sect. III.4, resolution 4/21.

[8] A/AC.198/1999/2.

[9] A/AC.198/1999/8.

[10] Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 21 (A/42/21), sect. III.D, recommendation 36.

[11] A/AC.198/1999/3.

[12] A/AC.198/1999/4.

[13] A/AC.198/1999/5.

[14] A/AC.198/1999/6.

[15] A/52/871–S/1998/318.

Annex

Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information at the opening of the twenty-first session of the Committee on Information

1. I should like first of all to congratulate all the members of the new Bureau on their election. We are looking forward to working closely with all of them in the pursuit of our common objectives.

2. May I also take this opportunity to express my appreciation to our outgoing Chairman, Mr. José Alberto de Sousa and his colleagues on the Bureau, Messrs. Abassy, Abubakar, Martinsen and Skrypko, for the very effective manner in which they led the work of the Committee at a time of transition and reform in the United Nations. I should add that I have been profoundly gratified at the manner in which the Committee has proved to be such a valuable source of support and wise counsel to me personally, since my assumption of my functions as Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, just over a year ago.

3. I have been profoundly impressed by the strong tradition of consensus that has characterized the work of this Committee and I am confident that the same spirit will prevail this year and enable us to carry forward together the message of the United Nations as we give meaning and substance to our mandates.

4. The past year or more has been a time of change and reform for the United Nations. The Department of Public Information has indeed played its appropriate part in responding to the Secretary-General's call for reform. I had informed the Committee at its last session about the conceptual framework that we had developed to give substance to this response. During the consideration of "Questions relating to information" in the Special Political and Decolonization Committee last November, I had provided further information about the steps we were taking to reorient the policies and activities of the Department in pursuit of the objectives set by the Secretary-General. Today, I am going to report further on the progress that we have made so far. The Committee has before it seven reports dealing with various specific aspects of the work of the Department. They are being submitted in response to requests made by this Committee and the General Assembly. One of them, the report on the reorientation of United Nations activities in the field of public information and communications (A/AC.198/1999/2) deals directly with the progress in the implementation of the Department's reform measures.

5. In seeking to design and implement reorientation measures in the Department of Public Information, we have gained inspiration from the Secretary-General's clear recognition of the central role that information and communications play in the work of the Organization as a whole. Indeed, he has stressed that communications policies must be placed at the heart of its strategic management. The imperatives of the "information age" require of us both an adequate and imaginative response. Sensitivity to the needs of this era in international relations and in public affairs necessitates the creation of a "communications culture" throughout the United Nations. The Secretary-General has stressed this need repeatedly, and for me personally, and for my colleagues in the Department, this is our highest priority.

6. I should like to add that recent discussions with my colleagues in the senior management of the Organization have revealed a remarkable unanimity in the recognition of the key role of information and communications in all important aspects of their work. Indeed, I would postulate further, and state that a "communications culture" requires that information and communications priorities should invariably feature prominently in every policy, programme or project that the Organization plans and implements. In its most practical manifestation, this implies that sufficient resources should be allocated to these priorities in every case. At the same time, I am conscious of the financial constraints within which the Organization and indeed the Department of Public Information has to work. A zero growth budget means that the reorientation of public information policies and activities has to be carried out within the limits of given resources. Thus activities, such as expansion of the Department's outreach to the media and the public, greater interaction with non-governmental organizations and support for their activities, development of innovative programmes for schools and other educational institutions, development of outreach activities to the business sector, and so on, have all to be carried out through improvements in productivity. There is no other alternative for us but to ensure that we optimize the use of the limited resources available to us.

7. The advent of the "information age" is in many ways synonymous with the advent of "information technology". This of course brings to the fore the rapidly expanding role of the Internet. But beyond that, I must also stress the dramatic changes in the reach and scope of television and radio, as also in the unprecedented improvements in the speed of production and quality of print products. As we are

aware that new technologies are not readily available to many developing countries, the Department of Public Information continues to move forward on a broad front. The so-called traditional means of dissemination have to be maintained and improved continuously, while new technology is introduced as rapidly as is possible, taking into account the specific circumstances of each country or region.

8. At Headquarters and in several United Nations information centres, I am glad to say that we have made considerable progress in using the opportunities provided by Internet to very good effect. The United Nations Web site is now available in all six official languages. It is certainly our desire to bring all six Web pages on to a comparable basis. However, this is easier said than done.

9. The largest quantity of United Nations documents is produced in the two working languages, i.e., English and French. Bringing documentation in the other languages to the same level would involve very substantial expenditures. The various aspects of this issue are taken up in the report of the Secretary-General on the continuous development, maintenance and enrichment of United Nations Web sites (A/AC.198/1999/6) that is before the Committee.

10. The report outlines three alternative approaches. The first would involve the translation of all documentation that is at present available in English in the shortest possible time frame. The second would aim for the same target, but over a longer period of time. The third would seek gradually to bring as much material on to the Web page in the four other languages as is practicable over a period of time, and within current financial constraints. In our view, the most practicable alternative is the third one. Even in this case, we would need a modest infusion of additional resources to enable us to maintain and support a viable service.

11. The strong interest shown by Member States in the availability of the United Nations Web site in all official languages is indicative of the remarkable interest in this facility worldwide. Visits to the United Nations Web site have grown exponentially over the past year. As of 23 April, we had recorded some 45.8 million visits so far this year. Last year, the figure was approximately 25 million by the same date. Even more encouraging is the fact that the United Nations Web site is coming to be known all around the world. This year, visits have been recorded from some 150 countries. While the bulk is still from the industrialized countries, current growth indicators suggest a very rapid and encouraging expansion of accesses from the developing countries.

12. The initial role of new technology, and especially the Internet, as a medium for the enhancement of the Department's outreach, has necessitated some measures in the deployment of staff resources, in keeping with the high priority being attached to this activity. I have therefore established an Information Technology Section in my office and have redeployed staff to the Section from other parts of the Department. I must repeat, however, that further development of this activity would require additional resources from the regular programme budget.

13. The capacity of the Internet to carry messages instantaneously around the world has enabled us to place a great variety of information materials on it, including statements of the Secretary-General, reports of major intergovernmental bodies, daily news highlights, promotional materials on major United Nations themes and priorities, information about major world conferences, special sessions of the General Assembly and many other products.

14. The multimedia capacity of the Internet is now being used by the Department as an additional medium for the transmission of both radio and video programmes. The Internet is also being used for direct broadcast of United Nations radio programmes for regions where multimedia Internet use is available, through the new audio-visual Web page established this year. Efforts are being made to deploy technology that will enable broadcasters to use United Nations programmes and audio clips posted on this page. The result is a speedier and more timely dissemination of radio materials directly to broadcasters. As this service improves, it will gradually take over the function presently being performed by the much more cumbersome and time-consuming method based on the supply of taped radio programmes. As the transmission technology is being improved, so is the training of staff to improve their technical skills and the quality of new content in programme production. Strengthened cooperation with the programmes, funds and specialized agencies of the United Nations system has helped further in providing more diverse programme material for broadcasts.

15. The Committee has before it a report on the pilot project to test the viability of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations, contained in document A/AC.198/1999/5. The report describes, in response to the Committee's request, how the pilot project could be carried out in all official languages. At this stage, I should like to stress that the long term project for the development of such a capacity depends on the availability of substantial extrabudgetary resources. So far, however, no concrete offers from Member States or organizations have been identified. In the circumstances, we have no choice but

to await such offers, before commencing with concrete measures on any aspects of the proposal.

16. In the visual area, the Department is closely following technical innovations which would enhance the use of television and video clips on the United Nations Web site. Photographs of the Secretary-General travelling on important diplomatic missions are now digitally transmitted to Headquarters, then instantaneously worldwide via the Internet. Also, arrangements are being made with international broadcasters to offer television footage globally. In addition to the broadcasting of "UN in Action" on the Cable News Network and on national broadcasting networks worldwide to an audience of millions, plans are being made for posting streaming video or digital files on the Internet, as and when cost and technology make this method more viable. We plan to introduce digital technology, which is expected to replace analog technology in the near future. In fact, this new technology is expected to replace the old completely in the United States of America and some other industrialized countries over the next decade. For the Department of Public Information, this means a carefully designed plan to acquire, within our resources, new equipment and to upgrade technology to enable United Nations Television to function fully in the new technological environment.

17. New technology is indeed a key factor in expanding outreach and in getting messages to target audiences on time. However, the importance of the content and quality of the messages continue to be the key to effectiveness. We have therefore taken important steps to develop a new capacity to improve our news gathering and delivery system. I have redeployed staff to the Media Division to establish a modest United Nations News Service. The Division itself will be renamed the News and Media Services Division to underscore the Department's enhanced news focus. With the assistance of United Nations information centres and services, the News Service will transmit breaking news via electronic mail and facsimile directly to the news desks of key media and other opinion-influencing audiences. Moreover, the Department will also continue to place planned and coordinated articles by senior United Nations officials in newspapers and other journals around the world. The central focus of the new service will be to ensure that media everywhere will be able to receive the latest news material from the United Nations in a readily useable format almost immediately as it is issued at Headquarters.

18. The international community has long recognized the unique capacity of the United Nations to bring all its members together to resolve issues that have a global impact: that is, issues that transcend State boundaries and cannot be solved by a single State or small group of States. Many of the mandates established by the General Assembly relate to such issues and it is the basic responsibility of the Department of Public Information to work closely with the various thematic departments of the Organization to help promote a public understanding of this essential role. In the context of the reorientation of the Department's activities, strengthening of working arrangements with the thematic departments is a key instrument in helping to improve the content and quality of the Organization's messages on global issues. Therefore, such working mechanisms that suit the specific needs of each thematic department have been developed in each programme.

19. Last year, we observed the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and also the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping. The Department worked closely with the thematic departments and offices in organizing special information activities, including exhibits, special events in partnership with non-governmental organizations and educational institutions, production of press kits, posters and other information materials, including a video documentary.

20. In the coming years, a series of major global conferences on economic and social issues are on the calendar. The Department has already strengthened consultative and working arrangements with the relevant departments at the highest as well as at the working levels, to ensure development of effective information strategies in the buildup to the conferences and upcoming special sessions of the General Assembly.

21. I should add further that the Organization's focus on development activities has received renewed impetus from the Economic and Social Council. High-level meetings, which include the Bretton Woods institutions, have given a new impetus to media interest in these deliberations. The Department has worked closely with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and with the leadership of the Economic and Social Council to promote media interest and coverage of these important meetings.

22. The Department also attaches special significance to issues of gender equality, which are incorporated in all information strategies developed for the whole range of United Nations themes in the economic and social field.

23. In the area of peace and security, an important achievement has been the establishment of close working relations with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, as well as with the Department of Political Affairs and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. In keeping with the Secretary-General's view that information

and communications should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization, I can say with considerable satisfaction that it has been recognized by all concerned that public information and communications would form part of the core of their activities. I am glad to say that, as a result of the efforts at improvement in cooperation and coordination among the departments concerned, the Department of Public Information is now included in consultations and preparations at the earliest stages of peacekeeping and other field missions. This enables the departments concerned to allocate adequate resources for information components of such missions on a planned, rather than ad hoc basis. The Department now serves as a focal point for support for public information and communications activities in field operations. Working closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, a careful study and review of experience in peacekeeping operations has enabled us to develop appropriate guidelines for the establishment and operation of public information and communications components in field operations.

24. Foremost is, of course, our partnership with the media, and particularly with the resident corps of correspondents at the United Nations. It is a partnership that I am personally committed to fostering. In addition to the significant steps we are taking to improve our capacity to deliver the news speedily and effectively, we are also constantly strengthening our cooperation with media organizations. This morning, we were able, with the help of senior and widely respected media personalities, to observe World Press Freedom Day. The Day is particularly significant, as it is the product of the deliberations of this Committee and the General Assembly.

25. The Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General has two functions: to provide and disseminate information to the media regarding priority issues before the Organization and to support the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General in their media functions, such as interviews, news conferences and other press appearances.

26. The Spokesman for the Secretary-General holds daily briefings at noon for the United Nations-based press corps and for delegations at 12:30 p.m. The briefings, which reflect the Secretary-General's activities and thinking, newsworthy developments originating at Headquarters as well as major United Nations activities worldwide, are a main source of the latest information on the United Nations. Highlights of the daily noon briefing are compiled and posted on the United Nations Web site by 3 p.m. of the same day to ensure access by the widest possible audience. To ensure wider coverage, the Fridays' briefings include a forecast of some of the following week's events.

27. The Spokesman and his staff give interviews, arrange interviews with senior United Nations officials, set up background briefings and provide up-to-date information by answering questions and producing fact sheets on newsworthy topics relevant to the United Nations.

28. In the field of television, our cooperation with major television organizations from around the world in organizing an annual television forum continues with added support from larger numbers of sponsors. This year, our preparatory process has already commenced and we are focusing on themes relating to the role of television in promoting peace, development and human rights. The Department is also helping facilitate the convening of a major Cable News Network conference at Headquarters this week, to foster the cooperative relations that already exist with that world media organization. Also, we were recently able to host a meeting of editorial writers, who received detailed briefings from senior United Nations officials, as a means of helping them to better understand our work and to reflect that understanding in their articles. What I wish to underscore here is that we have adopted a dynamic and proactive approach to our cooperation with our media partners.

29. The United Nations recognizes the important role of civil society as partners in pursuit of its objectives. The Charter itself speaks of the role of non-governmental organizations. The Department has fostered this partnership from its very inception. Nowadays, indeed the significance of the role of civil society is considered axiomatic.

30. Non-governmental organizations continue to seek association with the Department in larger numbers. I should like to consider that as a vote of confidence! The number of non-governmental organizations associated with the Department is close to 1,600 and should surpass this number before the end of this year. Our programme of weekly briefings, our annual conference, a variety of joint activities and many other services continue to strengthen our relations with those important partners.

31. The Charter of the United Nations begins with a reference to our future generations. Our educational programmes are aimed precisely at this group. Workshops for teachers, "students' days at the United Nations", students' conferences on various United Nations themes, tele-conferences reaching some 5,000 schools throughout Canada, Mexico and the United States of America, improved guided tours and group programmes and user-friendly publications targeted at students are all examples of a more dynamic and proactive approach to developing partnerships for information and communications.

32. To encourage new partnerships and generate support in the business community, the Department has recently launched a new Web page. This service should help corporations locate United Nations services that they require. Within 36 hours of the launch of this page in January 1999, we recorded more than 10,000 visits to the page. Apart from being vendors of equipment and expertise, businesses can use United Nations statistics and technical studies and benefit from international standards and agreements facilitating international trade, investment, communications and transportation, among others.

33. The United Nations is a major source of studies and documents for which there is significant demand among academic and research institutions. However, there is also need for presentation of information in the form of publications for more general use. This includes publications describing the work of the Organization, as well as its decisions and declarations. The Department's publications programme is being revitalized to focus on demand-driven publications that demonstrate the relevance of the work of the United Nations to daily lives of people everywhere.

34. A readership survey has enabled us to revitalize our main publications. The *UN Chronicle* is more attuned to the thematic mandates of the Department, while *Basic Facts about the United Nations* has been refined to include some of the findings of the survey. Furthermore, efforts are underway to ensure its continuing relevance as a key reference publication, including its commercial possibilities. Effective utilization of the electronic medium is also of help in supplementing print publications by offering search capabilities.

35. Modern technology has enabled us to improve the timeliness of future volumes of the *Yearbook of the United Nations*. The elimination of the backlog will enable the Department to launch a revenue-producing CD-ROM project incorporating the first 50 volumes of the *Yearbook* from 1946 to 1996. Electronic dissemination is now central to the highly time-sensitive periodical *Development Business*. Indeed in cooperation with the World Bank a Web site version has been developed.

36. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library continues to incorporate new technology as it moves steadily towards a virtual library with worldwide outreach. This involves further improvements in its Web page, which is being developed in all official languages, complemented by a six-language thesaurus for effective information retrieval. On the Optical Disk System, full texts of United Nations documents will become available through digitization in all official languages. Electronic communications will also improve significantly the speed with which documents become available to the 350 depository libraries around the world, and their communications with their users.

37. This brings me to the vital functions performed by our information centres abroad. The guiding principle in this context is in the idea of "A global vision, local voice". We have sought, with the limited resources at our disposal, to improve the access of our centres to new technology, thereby improving communications with Headquarters, as well as locally.

38. The information work carried out by United Nations information centres has to be seen in the light of the enhanced role envisaged for communications under the reorientation programme. I must candidly state that the pool of resources available to the centres has been shrinking very substantially in recent years. We are seeking to meet this challenge by continuously improving productivity. However, there is a minimum critical mass of staff resources that every information centre must have to be able to generate a meaningful impact. Despite limited resources, many of our information centres have been able to record some remarkable successes in working with the media, in organizing exhibits and special events with local governments or non-governmental organizations, in producing local language publications and in developing Web pages in local languages, to name just a few of their achievements.

39. The integration of a number of centres with offices of the United Nations Development Programme was premised on prospects of cost savings and improved productivity. The Committee has before it a report on this issue contained in document A/AC.198/1999/3. The experience of several integrated centres suggests that in some cases we have fallen short of these objectives. Consultative mechanisms with the United Nations Development Programme have been established to find remedies for the problems identified and it is my hope that such consultations will be fruitful. However, the experience so far underscores the need to approach proposals for integration with great care, taking all relevant factors into account.

40. The creation of a "communications culture", the reorientation of the Department's activities towards that end, the generation of a dynamic response by the Department to the challenges of the "age of information" — all of these call for change and renewal in the Department of Public Information. These are being achieved in two ways — firstly, through necessary structural changes in the Department effected in conjunction with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, and secondly, through changes in work methods and improvements in productivity.

41. Key structural changes have occurred with respect to the strategic management of the Organization's information and communications policies and the development of overall communications strategies. To underscore his personal encouragement of these issues, the Secretary-General has appointed a Director of Communications in his office. He has authorized him to convene, on a weekly basis, the Communications Group in which I participate, along with the Assistant Secretary-General for External Relations, the Secretary-General's speechwriter, the Secretary-General's Special Adviser, the Spokesman and senior members of our respective staff. This development follows the recommendation of the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities for greater coordination among the various parts of the Secretariat and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General dealing with public information and communications. The Communications Group has enabled all of us to stay closely in touch with the Secretary-General's priorities in this field on a continuous basis, and given greater coherence to our activities.

42. Also, within the Department of Public Information, I have established a Strategic Communications Planning Group, which includes all the Directors and Service Chiefs and meets with me every week. The effect of this new approach have been enhanced communications and coherence within the Department, while providing a window on strategic direction and deliberations from the senior management of the Organization.

43. I have conveyed to you various aspects of the Department's work. I look forward to hearing the views of Member States during this session. In closing, I wish to express appreciation for your continued support and extend to you the Department's wholehearted commitment to continue working closely with you.

44. In paragraph 42 of its resolution 53/59 of 3 December 1998, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-first session on the activities of the Department of Public Information.

45. During the period under review and as part of its efforts to promote informed public understanding about the goals and activities of the United Nations worldwide, the Department of Public Information has continued to develop partnerships and strengthen the channels of communication with a broad range of information redisseminators, including the media, educational institutions, United Nations depository libraries, non-governmental organizations and other elements of civil society. Public interest in the Organization has also been enhanced through education and training programmes, special events in observance of selected commemorative days and years, exhibits and services to the public.

46. In stressing the importance of developing a "culture of communications" throughout the Organization, the Secretary-General has emphasized the crucial role of the Department of Public Information in helping to improve the communications content of the activities of other substantive departments. The Department now maintains a system-wide calendar of special events and exhibits at Headquarters and encourages all offices, programmes, funds and specialized agencies to update their information on a regular basis. This information is available to the public and the media via the United Nations Web site.

47. In the recent past, the Department's press releases, which are highly valued for their comprehensiveness and timeliness, were available only to a restricted audience at Headquarters and — days later by pouch — to the United Nations information centres and services. Today, they circle the globe via the Internet almost instantaneously. They provide detailed written accounts of the proceedings of intergovernmental meetings held at the United Nations and other United Nations news to the media, Government offices in Member States, to the global network of United Nations information centres and services and to other United Nations offices away from Headquarters, as well as to non-governmental organizations and the public at large.

48. The "Daily Highlights" on major, breaking United Nations news are produced throughout the year and made available in both electronic and print form. Stories on major events are now written and posted on the United Nations Web site as soon as they occur, and links to the main sources of information — for example, press releases and Security Council resolutions — are provided, where possible.

49. The production and dissemination of radio programmes remains one of the most cost-effective and far-reaching channels of information available to the Department and considerable progress is being made towards the utilization of new communications technologies for wider outreach.

50. The Department currently maintains news Web pages in Chinese, English, French and Spanish. Page contents are gradually being enhanced through the introduction of full feature programmes for downloading by individual users and radio stations. In its continuing efforts to enhance electronic dissemination of broadcast radio information, the Department has made arrangements with the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to post

the weekly "Women" programme series on their joint Web page.

51. The Department has continued to provide multilingual daily radio coverage of all major developments within the United Nations and the common system, including meetings of intergovernmental bodies, the travels and meetings of the Secretary-General and field activities. For the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for example, the Department produced a series of 10 radio programmes on population and human rights, disseminated a public service announcement on human rights in 15 languages and organized a live international radio interview for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which was broadcast to five continents.

52. Programme production in official and non-official languages dealt with an extensive range of core issues within the purview of the United Nations system. Among the many issues addressed were drug control, child labour, the human rights and empowerment of women, population and development, climate change, the fight against HIV/AIDS, the roll-back malaria campaign, protection of civilians in armed conflict, the alleviation of poverty and United Nations relief efforts in Central America.

53. In the television production area, the Department emphasizes products which are in demand by outside broadcasters. It is also seeking to strengthen cooperation among agencies of the United Nations system as well as with national television networks. The "UN in Action" series of television news features continues to be distributed to more than 100 broadcasters worldwide.

54. An important co-production agreement was signed recently between the Department of Public Information, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund and the German public television network ZDF for the production by ZDF of five documentaries under the theme "Children without Childhood". This is designed to coincide with the date in October when the world population is expected to pass six billion. This type of agreement, which combines the experience of the United Nations system with the talents of a major broadcaster, is an example of how the Department is forging partnerships with important players in the world of the international media.

55. In order to better integrate the use of the Internet into the Department's production and dissemination activities, a Multimedia Assets Promotion and Distribution Unit has been created from operations that until now functioned separately. The new unit consolidates the sound, film, videotape and photo libraries and the promotion and distribution unit. This unit is developing an integrated database for all of the Department's production archives, which will have significant long-term benefits for the Organization. A production service infrastructure will be provided to serve the needs of users of new information technologies, while maintaining full support for traditional users of the Department's multimedia output.

56. An important component of the online access is the United Nations Intranet and the Department is utilizing this medium to disseminate information to staff throughout the Secretariat. In the belief that information disseminators must themselves be informed, the Department includes breaking news on international political developments and other news information products, an array of information resources and a calendar listing, on a daily and monthly basis, of United Nations and related activities worldwide. The Department intends to expand its presence on the Intranet in a coordinated and integrated manner.

57. Training opportunities for journalists and broadcasters from developing countries continue to be offered by the Department. Its six-week annual training programme for junior and mid-level media professionals will begin in mid-September for participants from 20 Member States, four of them sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany. The Department is also exploring the possibilities of creating a similar programme for journalists in developed countries.

58. From 15 October to 20 November 1998, the Department organized a training programme at Headquarters for a group of nine Palestinian media practitioners. The programme comprised briefings by senior officials and hands-on training in various departments, in addition to two weeks of classes at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, as well as briefings and workshops by prominent media organizations based in New York.

59. The United Nations World Television Forum is an example of the initiatives launched by the Department to strengthen partnerships with its key constituents, in this case with media institutions and the television industry. The third Forum was held in November 1998 on the theme of "The Future of Audio-Visual Memory: Looking at the twentieth century — Towards the twenty-first century". Once again, it provided a unique opportunity for executives, experts and other interested parties from all over the world to come together to discuss some of the major challenges facing the television industry worldwide and the central role that television plays in addressing the critical issues of our time. The success of the Forum was reflected in the fact that the number of attendees has never been higher, nor has the

geographical representation been greater, with representatives from more than 80 countries taking part in the discussions. The growing interest in the Forum is further reflected in the fact that the group of sponsoring organizations was much larger than ever before. In addition to Radiotelevisione Italiana and Mediaset, who had supported the previous Forum, the group of main sponsors included the International Council of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK). In addition, the forum was co-sponsored by the European Telecommunications Satellite Organization (EUTELSAT), National Association of Television Program Executives and TV 5 — the French-speaking worldwide satellite television. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy once again provided valuable support, as did the Permanent Mission of Japan, for which the Department is grateful.

60. The Department, in close cooperation with other substantive departments of the Secretariat and with programmes and funds of the United Nations system, is continuing to focus many of its activities on the follow-up to the cycle of world conferences held earlier this decade. Preparations are also under way for the two special sessions of the General Assembly. The first, to be held in New York from 30 June to 2 July 1999, will review action taken since the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development held at Cairo. The second, which will also be held in New York, from 27 to 29 September 1999, will review the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, in follow-up to the Barbados Conference held in 1994. Information activities for this special session are being carried out in close cooperation with the Alliance of Small Island States. Also, to arrange promotional outreach in island regions — the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Ocean areas — the Department is pursuing partnerships with United Nations information centres, field offices of the United Nations Development Programme and regional economic and social commissions for Latin America and the Caribbean and for Asia and the Pacific.

61. Over the last year, the Department has also worked closely with other substantive offices to promote two United Nations initiatives in the field of development: the insertion of United Nations viewpoints into the centre of the world debate on issues of finance and economic globalization, and the formation of a new relationship between the United Nations and the private sector. It has also promoted the partnership with business, spearheaded by the Secretary-General, which took shape through his meetings with the International Chamber of Commerce and with United States business leaders held early in 1998, his major policy statement at the Davos World Business Forum and the opening, early in 1999, of a Web page dedicated to interactions with the corporate sector.

62. During the period leading up to Human Rights Day 1998, the Department undertook numerous projects both at Headquarters and in the field. One of its initiatives was the placement of pro bono advertisements for the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in airline in-flight magazines. The material provided to those magazines included archival photographs, the text of the Universal Declaration, graphics for the special logo and slogan and other background information. Eight magazines placed these materials in their publications.

63. The events held at Headquarters on 10 December 1998 were numerous and several required close cooperation among the Department of Public Information, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for External Affairs, among others. The Department cooperated with the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, which organized the Human Rights Film Festival to screen documentaries in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium on 3, 4, 7 and 9 December. The premiere of our documentary "For Everyone, Everywhere", containing archival footage on the history of the Universal Declaration, took place on 7 December 1998.

64. Another event co-sponsored by the Department and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights featured three Messengers of Peace: Luciano Pavarotti, Michael Douglas and Anna Cataldi. They presented the Secretary-General with the children's passport version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was then distributed to the visiting children. It is envisaged that this version will eventually be reproduced in all 260 language versions of the Universal Declaration. Other related events included the opening of the Department's exhibit on human rights, a special event co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of the Republic of San Marino, the Office of the High Commissioner and the Department, to launch the United Nations Web page of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the official languages; as well as an evening recital in the General Assembly Hall featuring Mr. Pavarotti and Wynton Marsalis.

65. The Department is now working on communications strategies for the major meetings planned for the year 2000. The thrust and elements of these global information campaigns have been discussed with the other substantive offices concerned and will be presented to our system-wide colleagues at the next session of the Joint United Nations

Information Committee, scheduled in July. The strategies focus on the Tenth United Nations Congress on Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, to be held at Vienna from 10 to 17 April 2000; the special session of the General Assembly for the five-year review of the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held at New York from 5 to 9 June 2000; and the special session of the General Assembly for the five-year review of the World Summit for Social Development, to be held at Geneva from 26 to 30 June 2000. Initial planning is also under way for information activities to promote the Millennium Assembly, to take place in September 2000.

66. In close cooperation with the relevant departments and offices of the Secretariat, the Department is making every effort to disseminate as widely and as effectively as possible, through all available media, accurate information about the scope of the United Nations involvement in peace and security issues, and about the underlying principles that guide United Nations engagement.

67. It continues to work closely with the Department for Peacekeeping Operations with two main objectives in view: to make available to the media and to a variety of audiences timely and accurate information about United Nations peacekeeping missions; and to ensure that a public information strategy is an integral part of each mission's concept of operations. During 1998, the Department concentrated its efforts on: the support for information components of field missions; activities marking fifty years of United Nations peacekeeping; and preparation and updating of products for posting on the Internet.

68. The fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping operations in 1998 served as a point of departure for a variety of the Department's activities. The Department produced a major photographic exhibit on the first 50 years of United Nations peacekeeping. It was inaugurated on 6 October 1998, on the occasion of the General Assembly's commemoration, and was viewed by at least 45,000 people. Governments and non-governmental organizations in several countries have expressed interest in organizing travelling versions of the exhibit. In April 1999, it was displayed at the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. In June, it is expected to travel to Germany and Singapore has generously agreed to underwrite production of a version for display at the summit of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, scheduled to be held in July.

69. The anniversary also offered an opportunity for more direct communication between peacekeepers and students. The Department launched an interactive Web page devoted to peacekeeping in connection with its highly successful CyberSchoolBus site. Some 140 schools around the world were able to benefit from electronic mail question and answer sessions between students and public information personnel in five United Nations peacekeeping operations. A Web conference held on Peace Day 1998 linked United Nations Headquarters, peacekeepers in the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force and students in schools in Finland and the United States.

70. The Department maintains a series of pages on the United Nations Web site providing background information and basic facts on each peacekeeping mission. Every effort is made, within the available resources, to update this information regularly, and to provide coverage in languages other than English, whenever possible.

71. Many peacekeeping training and simulation exercises conducted by Member States and regional organizations, often organized with the assistance of the Training Unit of the Department for Peacekeeping Operations, to instil the best practices of peacekeeping, have included segments relating to public information. The provisional Guidelines Manual for public information in peacekeeping and other field missions, developed by the Department, has been published in the Training Unit's *Handbook* series, and distributed both in print and in the CD-ROM format to peacekeeping training programmes worldwide.

72. The Department of Public Information is working closely with the Department for Disarmament Affairs on public information aspects of the Coordinating Action on Small Arms process, including preparation of a documentary video on the flood of small arms and their impact on conflict situations.

73. The Department has launched a specialized Web page on the Intranet for maps, which contains up-to-date peacekeeping maps, regional and country-profile maps, as well as information on cartographic resources and recent acquisitions of the Map Library. The site is scheduled to be posted shortly on the Internet in English and French. The digital cartographic display system introduced last year to assist the Security Council consultations will be further improved in the near future with the introduction of more interactive maps.

74. In accordance with resolution 53/41 of 2 December 1998, the Department has continued its ongoing special information programme on the question of Palestine. It organized an international seminar for journalists on the question of Palestine, held in Madrid on 23 and 24 March 1999. The seminar, entitled "Prospects for Peace", was hosted by the Government of Spain. It brought together Palestinian and Israeli experts, as well as policy makers and academics from the Middle East and the United States of

America and senior media representatives from media organizations in Africa, Asia, Europe, Israel, Spain and Palestine.

75. The Department of Public Information provides an array of services for the rapidly growing number of associated national and international non-governmental organizations. On 2 December 1998, it granted association to 29 additional non-governmental organizations from nine countries, bringing the total to 1,581. The newly associated nine non-governmental organizations include one from Asia; eight from Europe; one from the Middle East; one from Canada; and 18 from the United States. All these organizations have strong public information capacities and reach very large constituencies and represent a diverse range of interests, including the rights of indigenous and disabled people; women and youth; human settlements; and disarmament. Several conduct research and promote education on a range of issues, including peacekeeping, conflict resolution and reconciliation. Last month, the Department organized its annual two-day orientation programme to acquaint these newly-associated non-governmental organizations and all newly-accredited representatives with the range of services provided by the Department and other United Nations offices.

76. Departmental weekly briefings for non-governmental organizations, which usually attract some 200 participants, provide a direct dialogue on current issues before the United Nations. To facilitate access to United Nations information and documentation, the Department maintains a Resource Centre which provides non-governmental organizations with United Nations documents, publications, press releases, as well as a system-wide lending library of United Nations video materials.

77. The Department is currently planning its fifty-second annual DPI/NGO Conference, scheduled to take place at Headquarters from 15 to 17 September 1999. The theme of this year's conference is globalization. Last year, over 1,900 representatives of non-governmental organizations from over 60 countries attended the conference.

78. As a highly visible, immediate and personal means of communicating information about the United Nations, direct contact with the public plays an important role, allowing the Organization to reach and directly inform over 600,000 people annually. That public contact takes many forms: providing research and responses to queries, along with information materials designed to address specific interests and frequent questions; organizing briefing programmes, teachers' workshops, special events for students and, increasingly, video-conferences; as well as offering the guided tour of Headquarters in over 20 languages.

79. With students and teachers accounting for about half of the audience addressed by these activities, there has been a special emphasis on developing materials and organizing programmes specifically targeted towards them. These include "Discovering the United Nations", a booklet introducing the United Nations to students, which has become extremely popular and is now being translated into numerous languages, many times with the assistance of the network United Nations information centres.

80. Other events also include activities such as the Students Conference on Human Rights, held on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December last year, which brought together student delegates from nearly 200 schools throughout the United States and seven other countries and was widely praised by panellists and participants alike. The relationship developed with the New York City Board of Education in the course of our planning for this event will help us develop other joint projects in the future.

81. One of those areas is teacher training workshops, aimed at acquainting educators with the issues being discussed and the resources available at the United Nations, and thereby equipping them to bring the United Nations into the classroom in a more accurate and effective way. The number of such workshops is on the rise. There is also increasing interest in video-conferences with United Nations officials. By mitigating the problems of availability of conference rooms, security clearances and time constraints of speakers, teleconferencing is an efficient and economical method of education outreach and one which we are expanding.

82. At the same time, the Department continues to organize a full calendar of briefing programmes for visiting groups. Over the past two months alone, larger groups that the Department accommodated included the annual conferences of both the National High School and the National College Model United Nations (each drawing over 2,500 young people to Headquarters), one day of the National Convention of the United Nations Association of the United States of America (800 people), the twenty-first annual Lions Day with the United Nations (600 people), and the annual programme of the International Federation of Social Workers (200 people).

83. In July, the Department of Public Information will be completing a full year of operations using a computer system that links tour reservations and the scheduling of briefing programmes with the ticket sale and guide dispatch activities in the Public Lobby, providing everyone with up-to-the-minute information online. Tour operators, schools, and permanent missions calling to request tours or briefings can

now be handled more efficiently; speaker and subject availability for groups is more easily determined; special ticket promotions can be tracked; less time is spent generating routine monthly reports and reports responding to specific requests.

84. The ongoing restrictions on the number of visitors per guide and the physical conditions and limitations of the tour route continue to cause concern. They not only have an adverse impact on the efficiency of our operation, but also reduce our ability to portray the United Nations in the most positive light possible. These are the matters that I intend to take up with my colleagues in the Office of Central Support Services as well as with partners in non-governmental organizations and others who may be of assistance in securing the additional sources of funds needed to support this effort. We want the United Nations to come alive for visitors, for them to see the Security Council, General Assembly and other bodies in action, for them to take away an experience that is memorable and meaningful. That means that we will need to not only create exhibits on the tour route that tell the United Nations story in an engaging and compelling way, but also address legitimate security considerations, all of which come at a cost beyond our current means. A survey is being developed to seek the views of guided tour participants on the effectiveness of the tours. I count on the advice and support of the members of this Committee in helping us to achieve our goals.

85. With a client-oriented service and an increasing focus on multilingualism, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library has continued to expand and enhance access to information. Most notable have been its achievements in Web-related activities, digitization, inter-agency resource-sharing and training programmes for permanent mission, Secretariat and depository library staff.

86. The Library's presence on the Internet continues to increase, with its Web site receiving 1,458,795 visits in 1998. New offerings include the full text of current General Assembly resolutions in English and French, the electronic newsletter "Depository News Updates", as well as the "United Nations System Pathfinder". This new database serves as a guide to major reference sources and frequently requested reports issued by the United Nations and the specialized agencies. Existing features have also been expanded. Furthermore, the Library's Web site has become more multilingual. Several texts aimed at depository libraries have been posted in French, as have lists of resolutions, declarations, etc., with links to full-text, where available. Since November 1998, parts of the Library site have also been posted in Arabic, Chinese and Russian.

87. The United Nations Consortium, an inter-agency activity coordinated by the Library initiated in 1998 for sharing the cost of site licenses for external online information services, has grown to 28 participating programmes and agencies. As a result of this expanded membership and the increased number of electronic products/services, cost-savings in 1999 are expected to exceed those of 1998. Remote desktop access is now available for delegates as well as staff in all participating agencies/programmes, to the full text of over 3,000 journals, 10 international newspapers, 5 major databases and more than 10 news wires in English, French, Spanish and German.

88. The cost of providing electronic services to the permanent missions continues to be borne for the most part by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. Where sufficient funding is not available, the Library, in cooperation with the Office of Support Services, makes every effort to coordinate subscriptions, secure volume-driven rates and arrange for direct billing to participating missions.

89. In December 1998, the UN21 Award was presented to the team from the Dag Hammarskjöld Library who had worked on the design and implementation of the customized electronic mail service available to more than 5,000 subscribers worldwide.

90. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library also arranges for the distribution of documents and publications to United Nations depository libraries. As of 30 April 1999, the total number of depository libraries was 373 in 143 countries. The number of United Nations depository libraries by region is as follows: 55 in Africa; 83 in Asia and the Pacific; 17 in Western Asia; 32 in Eastern Europe and 84 in Western Europe; 48 in Latin America and the Caribbean; and 42 in the United States of America and 12 in Canada. During this past year, the Library has conducted a number of workshops on United Nations documentation and electronic services. Furthermore, a five-day training programme was conducted at Headquarters for three librarians from a newly designated depository library in Belarus.

91. In 1998, Dag Hammarskjöld Library expanded its training activities on access to electronic resources, including a series of subject-oriented and news-gathering courses in Internet searching. These included "International Organizations", "Environment and Sustainable Development", "Peacekeeping Operations", "Human Rights" and "Human Resources".

92. In order to facilitate multilingual subject access to United Nations databases, including the Optical Disk System, the Library has undertaken a project to translate the

UNBIS Thesaurus, which is already available in English, French and Spanish, into the other official languages.

93. While electronic communication assures readiness and immediacy of access to information, the print medium continues to command its share of original readership as well as serving as an important source for the redissemination of materials. The Department's regular publications include the *Yearbook of the United Nations*, acknowledged as the preeminent annual source of reference on the Organization and its work, the *UN Chronicle*, a quarterly dealing with issues of concern to the world community, now available in all official languages; *Africa Recovery*, an important source of information and debate on questions relating to the continent; and *Development Business*, which offers one-stop access to procurement opportunities generated by projects financed by the United Nations system, including the World Bank, regional development banks and government entities.

94. The Department has continued to ensure the continuing relevance of its publications to its target audiences. New versions of both *Image and Reality* and *UN in Brief* have been produced, reflecting current issues before the Organization. The publications have made greater use of graphic and photographic elements to broaden their appeal, as suggested in the findings from the 1997 readership survey. In follow-up to this, as well, the Department is undertaking a more in-depth evaluation of *Basic Facts About the United Nations*, using focus groups based on principal target audiences in the academic and non-governmental organizations communities. Reflecting current United Nations priorities, a new edition in the *UN Briefing Paper Series* has been produced on the theme "Human Rights Today: A United Nations Priority". An edited version, in English, French and Spanish is also available on the United Nations Web site.

95. One of the Department's goals is to gear print production to take optimum advantage of the multimedia capacity of the Internet. Both the *UN Chronicle* and *Africa Recovery* have, through their online editions, enhanced their readership constituencies and subscriber base. "UN Development Business Online", which is, like its print edition, subscriber driven, has been launched this year. Plans for the creation of a revenue-generating CD-ROM, covering the first fifty volumes of the *Yearbook of the United Nations*, are under way.

96. The utilization of the Internet and electronic media to promote and distribute sales publications continues to be a priority. The United Nations Publications Web page, which provides regular updates of all new titles in English, now also provides information in Spanish and French. A site for Russian publications is also being developed. The ongoing development of this Web page, combined with the sale of publications through major Internet booksellers, has seen the average monthly income from the Internet double in the last year. New electronic products continue to be developed in association with author departments. CHEMLEX CD-ROM was launched in conjunction with the Economic Commission for Europe and the efforts are ongoing with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to produce the *Demographic Yearbook* on CD-ROM as well as a Windows version of the *Statistical Yearbook*.

97. The Department completed a significant renovation of the United Nations Bookshop at Headquarters earlier this year. Visitors to the building are now greeted with a more spacious, attractive store, which is better able to showcase United Nations publications. The additional space gained in the renovation allows a larger stock to be carried, offering customers a wider selection of titles and providing the potential to enhance the revenues.

98. By focusing on United Nations issues, customizing their information activities for a variety of audiences, and working directly with the civil society, the United Nations information centres are providing a vital service. In the process, they are also providing a forum for debate and community involvement in global issues that affect all segments of society.

99. The role of centres as communicators and catalysts was evident in the activities they carried out throughout 1998, covering all issues of political, development and humanitarian concern. The centres translated or produced feature articles, organized information campaigns and special events, and in so doing, contributed to raising public awareness of priority issues at the country level.

100. The observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights last year stands out as an excellent example of centres' reaching out to literally all segments of society. Details of the activities for the observance are contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the allocation of resources to United Nations information centres in 1998 (A/AC.198/1999/4).

101. The success of the information centres depends on a number of factors, among which I should like to mention the country-level coordination with partners in the United Nations system. Inter-agency information committees convened by United Nations information centres led to more efficient and focused public outreach and dissemination, at the country level, of coherent messages on behalf of the United Nations.

102. During the past year, more than 30 per cent of the centre staff received training locally. In addition, the Department organized a one-week briefing programme at Headquarters for centre directors and a regional training programme for centre librarians. As we continue to provide new communications and office equipment to keep pace with technological developments, we are also very close to achieving the goal of one-to-one ratio of computers to staff in the information centres worldwide. These efforts contributed significantly to enhancing the information capability of the centres, including the production of local-language publications, use of the Internet resources, and development of centre Web sites, which now total 21. Many centres also assist their constituencies in accessing and navigating the United Nations information resources available on the Internet. In some locations, students get their first exposure to the new information technology when they visit the United Nations information centres.

103. The major strength of the centres, however, continues to be the small but dedicated team of information professionals in over 70 locations around the world who find a myriad of ways to keep the relevance of the United Nations alive in the public consciousness. I invite you to visit the Web page on activities of United Nations information centres, to see the latest and noteworthy initiatives undertaken by these invaluable offices in all parts of the world.

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